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ABSTRACT

The newsletter of the Japan Association for Language Teaching national special interest group on foreign language literacy includes these articles: "In Others' Words: How Learners Construct Reading Difficulties" (Andy Barfield); "Enabling a Reader Through Picture Books: A Case Study" (Fatimah Hashim); "Acquiring Communicative Competence in the Reading Classroom" (Maya Khemlani David); and "Linking Yourself to Professional Development" (Charles Januzzi). Book and instructional material reviews are also included. (MSE) (ERIC Adjunct Clearinghouse on Literacy Education)

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Literacy Across Cultures

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March 1999 Volume 3, Number 1

In Others' Words: How Learners Construct Reading Difficulties

Enabling a Reader Through Picture Books: A Case Study

Achieving Communicative Competence in the Reading Classroom

Links to Literacy

It Is Written

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Statement of Purpose

Literacy in one's first language (L1) has become essential for virtually anyone wishing to function in most of the modern world. At the same time, growing contact between the world's people has increased the need for foreign language learning and has highlighted the need for a greater understanding of the aspects, processes, development and implications of FL literacy (FLL). The Foreign Language Literacy Special Interest Group (FLL SIG), a special interest group under the auspices of the Japan Association for Language Teaching (JALT), seeks to network people, ideas, theory, practice and experiences that can help lead to a better understanding of FLL. In doing so, we aim to move beyond idealized constructs of the L2 and FL learner, and to make clear the differences between L1, L2 and FL literacy practices, processes and theoretical models.

To do this, we seek to encourage locally relevant research into foreign language literacy in Japan and to map out commonalities and differences between features of foreign language literacy in Japan and in other countries. The FLL SIG also aims to foster and network study groups and local grassroots linkups with teachers in other countries in order to learn about their situations and needs, and to create greater understanding and mutual cooperation between teachers in different countries and situations.

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In Others' Words: How Learners Construct Reading Difficulties

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This article is based on a presentation made as part of the Foreign Language Literacy SIG's roundtable at the 1997 JALT conference in Hamamatsu. In that presentation, I reported on what I had been trying to do in order to understand better what first-year non-English majors at the University of Tsukuba—Art and Design students in this case—found difficult in reading English. Data sources for this exploration consisted mainly of student self-reports written in English and collected from the students over a one-year period (academic year 1996-97). I used these self-reports to try and start answering from the learner's point of view three basic questions:

- What do learners report as difficult in reading graded stories (summer term)?
- How can learners move from graded to authentic reading material (autumn term)?
- What do learners report as difficult in reading expository prose and academic text (winter/spring term)?

In this short article, then, I share some of the insights that such self-reports revealed. But first, questions of method need consideration.

Methodological Issues

As the writer, I naturally hope that you find the interpretations in this article trustworthy—that it meets your own experience and broadly parallels your own explorations with teaching reading. Though these interpretations are based on what my learners have told me, some words of caution are in order about the method of data collection. First, there is a question of how explicit the data can be considered. Seliger and Shohamy (1998), for example, rate self-reports as low in explicitness and advise multiple sources of data collection (p.127). Note that I used one source only—the learners' own self-reports. Second, where self-reports are used as a primary source, differences may occur between reported and actual performance, so some sort of control for what Brown (1988) terms "extraneous variables" is recommended (pp. 29-41). Note also that no explicit control was carried out. Brown also discusses the possibility of "subject expectancy" where the "research subjects" may make their best efforts to provide what they perceive as the desired answers to the researcher, thus making the data unreliable (Brown, op.cit.). I was unable to find a time-effective way to cross-check what the learners reported at the time of collecting the data. I should also point out that the number of self-reports varies for each section of this article, and that the main point of triangulation has so far been against my own experience and that of other teachers. A final point to note is that the categorization of the learners' reported difficulties is by no means clear-cut.

A question of position? I find myself hyphenated between teacher and researcher — not quite able to reconcile the two (see Freeman, 1998, for an elaborate discussion of that very hyphen). However, Nunan (1992), for example, approves the rise of introspective methods of data collection in recent years for classroom research.

Moreover, he notes that it is hard to "see how the sort of data yielded by diaries and journals could be collected in any other way" (p.123). So, by way of qualifying the claims that are made in this article, it is probably best to describe the results as preliminary and in need of further investigation. They do set out some interesting and possible pathways, as you will see, but they are not absolutely watertight, in short.

Remembrance of Readings Past

I move now to the students' own experiences of reading in English, because this is what informed my decision to use extensive reading in the first place. How do first-year university students remember their past experiences in reading English? It seems that three features crop up again and again in their recalls: reading in order to learn explicitly grammar and vocabulary; reading aloud in order to practice pronunciation; reading as a means to memorization and test-taking. Comments such as the following from students illustrate these:

> In the third year, the substance of the lesson is grammar, grasping the content of the textbook, and reading it smoothly. I go to my teacher to have her hear my reading. If I can read the textbook by heart, she gives me marks... (Junior High)

> Then I entered a high school. We had two kind of English class, "reading class" and "grammar class". The content of the textbook become to be difficult. The vocabularies are rich and complicated. On every Tuesday we have the English test. It was said it "Weekly test" ... In the first year of high school it was written examinations. In the second, third year, it was written examinations and mark. My school class emphasized grammar and grasping the content of the sentences... (Senior High).

These experiences are to some extent an important part of the competitive preparation that school students must undergo for university entrance exams; one consequence that later becomes clear is how slowly first-year students initially plod through text as they read. Hence, the single greatest strength of extensively reading texts where the reader can experience a high rate of comprehension is that it makes reading both enjoyable and relatively easy. Reading can quickly become motivating. The risk, though, is to become complacent and believe that students do not face any problems in reading such graded texts.

Description of the Course

Before we look at any difficulties encountered, let me first contextualize the course by describing the materials, tasks and skills that formed the focus over three terms. Up to and including that academic year, I had organized the reading course into the following three different main components so as to match the three ten-week terms that the academic year is divided into at the University of Tsukuba. In the summer term, the reading materials consisted of a graded reader library that I had put together myself over a couple of years in the absence of any similar materials available at the university. Autumn term materials featured for five weeks each (i) newspaper articles chosen by the students themselves, and (ii) native speaker teenager content-based materials (such as books published by Usborne, which integrate explanations, instructions, and experiments in a visually colorful manner, as well as "How to..." books for native speaker adults, for which secondhand bookshops in the UK had provided a cheap source). In the final term, students were required to select their own expository prose/academic text books from the main university library and/or Art and Design library.

Reading tasks and skills practice varied according to the materials. For example, in the summer term, students read at least 600 pages, kept double-entry notes in their

pages, kept double-entry notes in their notebooks (key points from the text on the left page, student's own response/opinion/ comment on the right page). In-class activities included reading and discussion, reading for pleasure and enjoyment, setting their own reading goals and keeping learning diaries to review their performance and develop their awareness of their changing reading styles and habits.

On the other hand, in the second term, students were asked to read one newspaper article a week for five weeks, and 20-pages from content-based materials books per week for the other five weeks. Here, they made summary notes, plus vocabulary notes in English and engaged in some strategy practice such as skimming, scanning, using the index and list of contents, and reading non-consecutive pages. They also learnt to parse sentences, use dictionaries, exploit surrounding text to guess words, mind-map key points, connect their own associations with those key points in text, to continue to set goals and keep learning diaries.

In contrast, in the winter/spring term, students chose their own books from university libraries and kept double-entry notes plus mind maps, thus bringing together two elements from the previous terms. In particular, they were asked to copy on the left pages of their notebooks difficult parts of the text, and on the right page to put down a comment about the difficult part, to ask a question and to attempt to answer their question as well (see Mateer, 1998, for more detailed explanation of this technique). The class also undertook further strategy training, which centered on ways of activating background knowledge to make the reading load easier—reading for concrete "everyday" examples before identifying and analyzing main "abstract" ideas; identifying lexical chains and basic lexical relationships of equivalence and opposition; further parsing of sentences; engaging in cooperative reading problem-solving with their peers and the teacher, as well as continuing to set their own reading goals and keeping learning diaries.

Feedback

Encouraging regular feedback is part and parcel of adjusting the extensive reading component over each term, as are the tasks and skills work. Let's recall that the "simple" goal is to take students from reading graded easy-to-understand English through to being confident and motivated enough to tackle academic English on their own—and through into the future. At the same time, it is clear that this is by no means easy for students; in fact, it is a real challenge, given all the constraints. As such, to help my students meet that challenge, I depend a lot on what they tell me about their own reading processes—and their reading experiences, so that I can better advise and help them. In essence, if they don't explain to me where the reading difficulties lie, I am left at best as a classroom manager or resource provider. I am not, however, positioned to understand their reading processes any more clearly. In fact, although it is not always explicitly stated in learning-centered approaches, the teacher needs a constant stream of reflective feedback from the learner in order to play a more effective teaching role.

Problems Reported With Graded Text

Although students are able to gain a clear and strong sense of personal success in such reading, they do indeed face difficulties with graded text. What the results tend to show is that neither background knowledge nor complex sentence structure feature here as major difficulties for the first-year student reader of graded text. Rather, the students report comprehending as their most frequent difficulty—but comprehension from the point of view, it seems, of identifying strongly with the characters or plot development, and of trying to make sense of an incident or action whose implied meaning is not readily apparent. Language, it seems, does not get unduly in the way of trying to make the best sense of the stories, in other words. Thus,

the familiar arguments made in favor of extensive reading hold true—learners can read with ease, and do concentrate on comprehending; vocabulary can arise as a difficulty, but it is relative, and not the single biggest hurdle faced (see Bamford and Day, 1997). Further, the results also seem to show that extensive reading, within such an interpretation, facilitates reading with success —or, depending on your point of view, deftly circumvents problems that such students may face once they move on from graded text towards newspaper articles and content-based materials. The results are summarized in Table 1, where students had been asked to report typical difficulties that they experienced and to explain them in English (total number of self-reports = 140).

Table 1: What learners report as difficult in reading graded stories

Difficulty	No. of mentions	% of total	Example	Learner comment (unreformulated)
inferencing / disbelief/ comprehending	43	31%	*"Peter, you didn't write this story. You copied the story from a book. You cheated."*	Why did the teacher said so thing?
			Victor Frankenstein died a few hours after he had written his last word. I was sad to see him die, because he had become a good friend. But he will not be unhappy or in pain any more, and I am happy for him.	I couldn't understand this meaning. Why does he become happy for him?
vocabulary	32	23%	*He told the King that his daughter could make gold out of straw.*	I don't know the meaning of "straw". And I don't know "gold out of straw", too.
			Many people had come to the funeral.	I don't know the meaning of the last word.
sentence syntax	17	12%	*Then the diver came up for the last time, and the pearl that he brought with him was fairer than all the pearls of Ormuz, for it was shaped like the full moon, and it was whiter than the morning star.*	It is long sentence, words are used in the sentence is easy.
sentence meaning	14	10%	*"It's OK, man. I didn't burn, I'm fine."*	I don't know this sentence meaning.
real-world knowledge	7	5%	*Because the art group is meeting here this morning. I have to model for them.*	In America, is an art group meeting the house of members?
proper names	4	3%	*Grace bowed quietly and went back in through the dark door.*	I read this part of the book over and over, but I couldn't find some sentence about Grace, who she is.
Other: meta-questions, exclamations, discourse markers, pro-forms, ellipsis, pronunciation, poetry	23	16%	*As I landed, four of them came towards me and took me by the arms. 'We are taking you to Mr Kewin, the judge. He wants to ask you some questions about the murder of a man here last night.'*	One scene before this scene is a scene of ship. I feeled this change of scene is too rapid to understand. It needs much more explanation.

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Problems Reported With Newspaper and Teenage Content Texts

In the second term, the difficulties begin to shift. At this point in the year, the students are confident with reading; they have read many pages in the first term; they have also begun to improve their reading speed and fluency. Reading has started to become a success story. One lesson, though, that students indirectly learn with extensive reading is that they should read books through cover-to-cover, and that vocabulary can be largely understood in context through continuing to read and making repeated encounters with important items that are purposefully recycled through the story. When we look at the difficulties that students face in the second term, we see however that the different type of text is beginning to affect how the students perceive their reading difficulties as well as pointing to the need for more explicit awareness of choices and strategies that the reader can draw on. In the difficulties that students report on their problems with reading newspaper articles and teenage content-based materials, vocabulary clearly becomes the principal concern, with syntax and cohesion/coherence as secondary problems. Real-world knowledge remains a relatively minor obstacle. The shift in difficulties can be seen in Table 2 (total number of self-reports = 80).

The implication is then that explicit vocabulary learning and local, bottom-up inferencing need to be tackled to support the move from graded text towards "authentic text". (Though not the easiest of terms to define, "authentic text" does provide a terminological contrast with the usually careful arrangement of text that goes into graded readers.) Here, then, there seems to be a certain pay-off between beginning to train dictionary skills and beginning to deal with text that has not been specifically produced for language learning purposes. It is not necessarily, in my view, the best of all balances. Yet, it seems a necessary interim stage between the freedom of reading large amounts of graded text independently, and beginning to learn skills for reading academic text on one's own.

Bridging the Gap Between Everyday and Academic?

I have been trying to develop further that bridging stage of the academic year. My current understanding—derived from a Vygotskian division between everyday concepts and scientific concepts—is that much more might be done in this stage to promote awareness of different text types and of variations in text structure. Whether newspaper "front-page news" articles are suitable is another question, for they follow fairly tight genre specific conventions. Perhaps, it is rather newspaper report articles on social trends that offer a more suitable bridge, in that such texts are often organized into what might be called "narrative-reports/ explanations." That is, parts of such articles feature first-person narratives of personal experience, with direct speech and quotes, that follow a collapsed personalized narrative structure of event-complication-resolution. These narrative parts are embedded within an overall organizational structure of report-explanation, where the journalist reports on social trends through summarizing a recently issued report. In fact, such first-person accounts are often juxtaposed and used to exemplify "real" (i.e. selective) ideological contrast and difference between various claims presented in the report-explanation parts of the text. Thus, the discourse of such "narrative-reports/ explanations" newspaper articles often alternates between expository text (reporting and explaining the social trend or problem) and illustrative narrative text (providing first-person examples to typify the trend or problem) within a "macro" problem-solution pattern.

This is in part quite similar to the way that many academic books develop their argument —though academic text works at greater

Table 2: Difficulties as learners move from graded to authentic reading material

Example reading difficulty	The difficulty explained in the students' words	Action taken	Number of mentions	% of total
[Vocabulary] 1 The scientist found out the fungi was digestive. 2 Tokyo women injured in "copycat" attacks	I didn't know what digestive means. I didn't know the word "copycat".	[Use dictionary] I looked up my dictionary because I wanted to know what digestive means. I used my dictionary.	48	60%
[Syntax] Increasing public awareness and a tailing off in political viruses had cut significantly the infection rate suffered by Chinese computers, Wan said.	I don't know "tailing off in political viruses." I couldn't understand what a main verb is.	[Dictionary + parsing] I saw English-Japanese dictionary, but I didn't find "tail off". So I don't know now. Concerning grammar, I circled "Increasing ...political viruses" and lined on "significantly". I understand "had cut" is main verb, and "suffered" is adjunct of "the infection rate".	12	15%
[Cohesion and coherence] This was due partly to the rapid increase in demand for teachers and partly because of calls for diversification.	I don't know what to stand for meaning of "this".	[Continue to read; read before and after.] I continued to read near part of sentences.	8	10%
[Real world knowledge] Although he didn't have any on his wedding day - "I was still trying to hold back a bit so my wife didn't think I was weird" - this restraint apparently only lasted briefly.	The article tells about a man who devoted his life for ramen (Chinese noodle), And there were many unknown words about foods and tasting.	[Guess / imagine] I visualized when I eat ramen ...	5	6%
Other			7	9%

levels of abstraction and remote detail, and with much less directly recognizable first person experiences as supportive elaborations. Rather, many of the example elaborations in academic text take hypothetical everyday examples to make such a bridge (*Imagine for example ..., Take the case ..., X is a case in point*) between the two worlds of abstract ("scientific") concepts and the reader's imagined ("everyday") conceptual world. In effect, the narrative parts of such newspaper reports about social trends might be exploited to make the connection with graded texts of the first term, while the expository sections could be used to prepare for academic text.

Problems Reported With Academic Text

This brings us to the final part of this report, namely student perceptions of difficulties in reading academic text. Here, at first sight, it seems that vocabulary comes up

as the major difficulty. However, again, we can note an interesting result. Vocabulary difficulties can be almost evenly split between discipline-specific vocabulary (i.e. content) and expository text-specific vocabulary (i.e. argument structure and text organization). Further, at the sentence-level, sentence length/syntax and background knowledge clearly feature as almost equally relevant difficulties. This indicates that the problem cannot be solved through an exclusive focus either on top-down or on bottom-up processing. Instead, these results point to the validity of an interactive model of the reading process in the foreign language for first-year students reading academic text. This can be understood more clearly if we look at the results in Table 3 (total number of self-reports = 110).

These results are not surprising. What is surprising, perhaps, is that student self-reports largely reflect the "mainstream" claims and evidence about second language reading, as illustrated in the following comments by Eskey and Grabe (1988):

> ... we have no clear idea at this time of how readers in general combine bottom-up and top down processes, much less how particular readers do so. In practice, we are therefore still very dependent on each student's natural ability to learn, and our working goal must be to facilitate, not to mechanically control, that learning. (p.227)

> ...good readers process language in the form of written text without thinking consciously about it, and good second language readers must learn to do so... It is only this kind of *local* processing

Table 3: Difficulties as learners read expository academic text

Difficulty	# of mentions	% of total	Example	Learner comment (unreformulated)
vocabulary	27	25%	*The cult remained there throughout antiquity, dominating the city.*	The word "antiquity" is the noun, but for the meaning I don't have a clue. It might be pointing at a certain point or range of time.
			In the last days of the waning summer, I made the acquaintance of Beethoven and found this reputedly savage and unsociable man to be the most magnificent artist with a heart of gold, a glorious spirit and a friendly disposition.	I can't image a heart of gold. I guess this means cold or hard heart, or this means twinkling heart. I don't remember "acquaintance" well. But I think "make the acquaintance" means "meet".
technical phrases	23	22%	*Perception, according to Larry Samovar and Richard Porter, is the "internal process by which we select, evaluate, and organize from the external environment."*	I don't understand the words "evaluate", "stimuli" and "external".I think "external" is the opposite of "internal" so it means "outside". If so, "stimuli" means information, influence or something, I think "evaluate" is between "select" and "organize" in this sentence. So, it is the process after selecting and before organizing. I think the word like that is "judge whether a thing is right".

sentence length	21	20%	*By the Ninth Century the old Roman towns, most numerous in the provinces bordering the Mediterranean, had sadly declined from their earlier importance, while in Northern Europe town life, even of the relatively superficial Roman type, had never developed.*	When I read the sentences like this, I always try to find "S" and "V", but this sentence is too long to be sure which is "S" and which is "V".
background knowledge	20	19%	*In many cases, the buds of a new style do not appear at first in readily recognizable form. Nor do they appear in a positive form which is immediately accepted by the majority. This is clearly true when one considers the periods of transition in style in the history of painting and architecture.*	I don't know about the periods of transition in painting well. So, such general opinion I cannot understand ... I need more knowledge about art and design.
syntax	11	9%	*Hatovani (who incidentally wrote an obituary of Schiele) saw Expressionism as a response to Impressionism, in which the world and the ego had admittedly been in harmony but where the ego had become an illusion that was no more than the sum of disparate sensations.*	I don't know this sentence exactly. Especially, I don't understand two parts "which ~" and "where ~". I don't know what "which" and "where" mean.
cohesion	5	3%	*It uses the method of small regular strokes invented by Seurat and employed contemporaneously by the French Neo-Impressionists, but here it is only a motif, a method of stylizing nature, of using the fragmentation of objects in real space - leaves, trunks, flower petals - as just so many elements of a pattern.*	What does "it" express? I understand the meaning of sentence, but I don't understand what "it" is. I think "it" expresses the method of small regular strokes (pointillism)
other	3	2%		

> that allows for *global* reading with true comprehension. (pp. 235-236)

Personally, I am not so sure about that "must". And in a sense that's what I'm working on at the moment with another reading class, more than a year after I collected the student self-reports presented in this report. If learning is actively solving problems, then reading probably also largely consists of recognizing problems, articulating them and choosing the appropriate actions to take.

Final Thoughts

To sum up, despite methodological weakness with the data collection, this article has set out in broad terms how learners perceive the difficulties that they face in reading in a foreign language. These difficulties vary according to text and task. Learners need to practice a variety of different reading skills and vocabulary learning strategies if they are to maintain a high rate of success as they move from graded text towards academic English. By asking learners to identify and report the reading difficulties that they experience, many useful insights can be gained, not least of which is that over the course of one academic year the students become remarkably articulate and reflective in explaining how they read. This increased

***Barfield**, cont'd on p. 21*

Enabling a Reader Through Picture Books: A Case Study

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Many teachers are often at a loss of what to do with their low-proficiency EFL learners. These learners are seen to be lowly motivated as they normally have an assumption of inferiority: "I find English difficult," "I don't like the subject," "I am not good." There is value in training them to read in order to improve their proficiency and hence their motivation towards learning the language.

This paper discusses the merits of using picture books together with the explicit teaching of reading strategies in an interactive environment to train beginning readers. Results of a small study on the use of picture books to train a thirteen year old to read in English suggest that the learner made progress in her reading because interaction was the vehicle for instruction—the text series and the teacher brought together a critical set of events to support and provide scaffolding for the interactions the learner had with the texts.

Using Picture Books With Adolescent Readers

Picture books have long been considered to be of use only for young, beginning readers, both in first and second language reading. There is a dearth of research on their potential for facilitating reading for older learners learning English as a second or foreign language. However, one persistent proponent of the use of picture books for second-language learners, Smallwood (1987, 1992), has shown that literature exists that is appropriate for low-proficiency English learners who are older than the average age the picture books are written for. In fact, she found this literature to be appropriate for adult EFL learners as well. She outlines the characteristics of picture books:

- The themes, topics or story-lines of the books are appropriate to the age of the learners. The main characters are similar in age or older than the learners.
- The sentence patterns are simple and mostly controlled. These are often repeated.
- There is limited use of unfamiliar language and experiences.
- Rhyming is included as it aids memorisation and is generally useful in language learning.
- The plot is simple and straight-forward, in chronological order. Descriptions of characters are simple and clear. The stories are often action-packed.
- The use of dialogue is realistic.
- The books are suitable for reading aloud.
- The stories are short and can be completed in 5-10 minute sittings.
- The books are single volumes ensuring the students' sense of completion.
- The books are well-illustrated. Ideally, the reader is able to understand the story just by looking at the pictures. (Smallwood posits that this is important as both the teacher and the students depend on the pictures to explain new vocabulary or experiences.)
- The amount of text on a page is limited, as the page should contain more illustrations

than text. As the students increase in language proficiency, there should be more text than pictures.

Smallwood's list describes simple texts for a specific group of learners with specific needs, in particular, low-proficiency EFL learners. Her view reflects the thinking of proponents of teaching low-proficiency learners to learn a second or foreign language through reading. The advocacy of picture books also involves issues raised in EFL's ongoing debate about the merits and demerits of using simplified versus authentic texts. Elley (1984) argues that texts are simple only with respect to the needs of a specific audience, and this view is echoed by Alderson and Urquhart (1984), who assert that texts should be selected in terms of their appropriateness for the audience. Appropriateness involves many factors, including the amount of redundancy in a text (Haynes, 1984) and textual "density" (Berman, 1984), which need to be taken into account when choosing reading materials. These views are further affirmed by Carrell, Devine, and Eskey (1988, p.272) who conclude: "Reading of real, if simplified, texts should be at the heart of any second language reading program".

In Search of a Model for Teaching Reading

Questions of what materials to use are closely connected to reading models and teaching methods. Models of reading instruction abound, each emphasising particular processes and the instruction that stimulates those processes. One promising model for remedial reading instruction comes from Clay (1979). Clay's theory advocates the use of explicit, systematic teaching of reading skills, especially the elements of decoding, which is in opposition to the position of the whole language approach that places emphasis on the creation of authentic learning environments where any skills instruction that occurs should be in the context of natural reading and done only as needed. Clay's methodology and instructional principles, called Reading Recovery (Clay, 1993), combine elements of learning and teaching of potential value for a strategy-training model in reading for disadvantaged learners.

A close examination of the philosophy behind the Reading Recovery approach reveals that much could be adopted from Clay's theories of how learning can be accelerated. Through her work with at-risk readers, Clay posits that the low-achieving child needs security, self-confidence and acceptance. She argues that in order to facilitate learning for low-achieving children, the reading program must begin with the individual child to provide appropriate experiences for building on her prior knowledge. Drawing on Vygotsky's notion of the "zone of proximal development" (z.p.d), Clay reasons that the essence of successful teaching is for the teacher to know what each child's potential is for a particular task and to work with the child to reach her highest potential.

The notion of the teacher's role implicit in her view is that, in working alongside the child, the teacher can become a keen observer and develop skills in nurturing appropriate responses which can advance the child's learning. The teacher is also supposed to be fostering strategic control to enable the learner to learn to read by reading, promoting the development of the "Matthew Effect" (Stanovich, 1986), wherein the more a strategic reader reads, the more she improves her reading achievement. The interaction between child and instructor is crucial to its success. Although it may appear that Clay is particularly focused on a theory of early reading and child development in L1, there is a great deal in her methodology that seems useful for the acceleration of learning among low-achieving learners more generally. Whether she intended it or not, Clay has opened an avenue for generating practice-based knowledge about teaching reading.

Based on Clay's theory and pedagogy of accelerating learning for the low-achieving

learner, a reading program very similar to Reading Recovery (Clay 1979) was developed for a thirteen year-old EFL learner, Azira. Basically, Azira read picture books from the lowest level (a few words on a page) and moved up the levels (8-10 sentences on a page) as she progressed. Here's a brief description of the impact of the program on her.

Azira's Progress in Reading

Azira came from a very poor family and spoke no English at home. She said English was an important but difficult subject. She could remember reading about five English books with little understanding. She admitted that she had made no effort to improve her English on her own because she thought that she was not good in the subject. When asked what she did when she had difficulty understanding an English story book, she said she just put the book aside.

Although she appeared enthusiastic, Azira was a timid student when she read her first book for the program. She paused often and struggled to read a level one book (four short sentences a page). She reacted very positively to words of praise for good learning practices such as attempts at self-correction. As a result, she seldom made the same mistake twice. She was apprehensive about giving the wrong answers, speaking softly when she was not sure. Even when she gave the correct answer, she would hesitate when asked to repeat. On many occasions she responded to questions by staring at the book and frowning. To the question "Do you think you can be good in English?" she replied, "I don't know. It's hard."

After a few readings which were closely facilitated by the teacher, she began to show signs that she was consciously thinking about her learning, as illustrated by some of her earlier journal entries:

> When I come across a difficult word, I try to sound the words several times to hear it so I can understand what I am reading.
>
> I am not careful when reading. I go too fast and make mistakes. I hope to be more careful by pronouncing the words more clearly.

She had also begun to hypothesise about her reading ability. I observed that Azira would copy down the title and mark it every time she completed reading a book. She gave two reasons for doing that. One was to count the number of books she had read successfully and the other was to note the titles so she could recall the stories. Evidently, being able to read and understand what she read was important to her.

She was also trying very hard to use the prompted strategies to facilitate her reading and reported the use of self-questions often. When asked how she practised self-questions, she said, "When I come to a difficult word, I stop for a while and if I understand, I move on." Asked which strategy facilitated her comprehension, she said, "I look at the pictures. I try to follow the story."

Asked if she could tell me what she thought brought about the significant improvement in her reading fluency and comprehension, she said, "I understand the story." Her journal entry, however, provided some clues:

> I am trying to improve my English. With short words or words I have come across, I try to always remember the correct pronunciation before sounding out the words. With words that are difficult, I pronounce over and over again until I remember them.

Data from my observation record corroborate the data from her journal. Her journal entries indicate a realisation of her gains through involvement in the project. Towards the end she wrote:

> It (the program) has helped me a lot. I learn how to understand difficult words.

Before this I dare not read in English.
Now I know a lot of English words.

As acknowledged by her and as indicated by her reading performance, more and more encounters with known words gave her direct access to wider vocabulary of words that required little or no special procssing. Her journal entries show a real concern for managing her reading and correcting errors. Constantly repeated in the entries is the sentence, "When I read, I try to be conscious of my errors and correct them."

The Roles of the Text, the Teacher and the Learner

As this case study shows, respite for struggling EFL readers can be found in a reading program using picture books and where the teacher primes interaction with the learner so the learner can interact with the text successfully. The books used in these lessons played an important role. The student could read these short books quickly, gaining confidence that comes with accomplishment. In addition, the language of the text builds on and repeats phrases, thus facilitating the learner's interaction with it. This repetitiveness helps the learner to grasp important points and to provide an adequate synopsis of what is being read. This is important, as it has been shown that not being able to produce a summary is a clear sign that comprehension is not proceeding smoothly (Brown, Palincsar, and Armbruster, 1984). Because there is not much to remember, with guidance the learner can recall significant events in the stories for retelling. There is also less need for the learner to interpret the story since the storylines are simple. This reduces the fear of not being able to understand the content, which might affect learner confidence. The books also present material that is appropriate for the kind of interaction fostered in the program.

In general, the feelings of success and achievement that come with being able to read these texts and understand stories written in English can motivate learners to read more, improving their reading and understanding. When learners can easily grasp and quickly become familiar with the story, they are more likely to find reading a manageable and rewarding challenge (Clay, 1993). The picture books become a form of "comprehensible input" (Krashen, 1985) for these learners.

The role of the teacher is to guide the student to think about her reaction to the story and, in so doing, assess her comprehension. For example, Azira's attempts at sounding words were mainly guesses, as she had limited oral language to draw on. That is why the presence of the teacher is crucial—the feedback component of the interaction between the teacher and the learner is the essence of the approach adopted in this reading program. Because the aim is to make the student less dependent on the teacher as she gains confidence in her ability, providing immediate feedback on successful attempts is important. But responsibility also lies with the learner. The learner in this study attempted to take responsibility for her own learning by trying to problem solve her reading, illustrating that learning or reading a book successfully in English with accuracy and understanding was partly up to her. As her diary entries show, she was also capable of reflecting on her learning.

Some Propositions

Basically, how we treat individual learners is what is most important for learning to take place. A non-threatening environment can be created where they are encouraged to succeed in an atmosphere of comradeship and understanding. With this in mind, I would like to advance the following propositions about training low-proficiency or under-achieving learners in the use of strategies to facilitate EFL reading and comprehension:

1) It is possible to gain efficiency in reading when:

- the learner's attitude is positive
- the practice of strategies is followed by reflection on the experience
- there is comprehensible input from the teacher/trainer
- immediate feedback is given on good practices
- learners are allowed to use L1 in communication
- L1 is used when the teacher explains meanings and concepts when instructions are given.

2) Fluency and accuracy in reading can be achieved without oral proficiency in the language but with the use of carefully selected texts of appropriate difficulty.

3) Clay's instructional method and learning theory is potentially useful for guiding training in foreign language reading.

The study set out to document the effectiveness of using picture books together with the explicit teaching of reading strategies in an interactive environment, as proposed by Clay, in training a low-proficiency EFL reader. The results indicate that Clay's methodology is useful. Her model of reading acquisition defines reading as working continuously on manageable texts with the story as the focal point of attention. Azira's progress in reading and comprehension can be understood based on the principles driving this model of reading instruction.

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CAL likes LAC

The FL Literacy SIG of JALT is pleased to announce that its publication, ***Literacy Across Cultures*** (***LAC***), has been accepted by the Center for Applied Linguistics (CAL) of the USA for inclusion in the ERIC educational database. This means that articles appearing in LAC and abstracts derived from those articles may be accepted for dissemination to educators and scholars worldwide through CAL and ERIC. For more information on how to receive or contribute to ***LAC***, please contact David Dycus, ***LAC*** editor.

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Acquiring Communicative Competence in the Reading Classroom

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The notion of social acceptability and the correct use of language depends on what we understand of the norms of behavior in the target language. If the goals of language teaching are to enable the learner to communicate with both native and non-native speakers in English, then it is important that the norms of language behavior of interlocutors from a range of different cultures are also taught in the English language classroom. This means that the learners must not only be linguistically competent but also communicatively competent, having "the knowledge of linguistic and related communicative conventions that speakers must have to create and sustain conversational cooperation" (Gumperz 1982, p. 209). The differences in accepted norms of behavior are generally reflected in speech acts. The analysis of speech acts by Searle (1969) is of great interest in this connection because explicit criteria for the functions of speech acts are proposed. In a speech act the relationship between grammatical form and communicative function is accounted for by saying that each utterance is associated with a certain illocutionary force indicating device or illocutionary act potential (Searle, 1969). However, speech acts are not comparable across cultures (Schmidt and Richards, 1980). Culture-specific speech acts necessitate a familiarity with value systems. Only then can the illocutionary force behind the speech act be understood. Learners of English must be made consciously aware of the differences in certain speech acts when used by a native speaker of English and by a second language learner of the language because the values and cultural norms underlying the English language which a non-native speaker uses are not necessarily the same as those of a native speaker.

Kachru (1996, p.97) states that the new cultures in which English has been or is in the process of being nativised have their own necessities for politeness, apology, persuasive strategies, and so on. Consequently, there are many norms of speaking. Reading teachers must not only be aware of cultural and socio-linguistic differences underlying the communicative behavior of native and non-native users of English, but also transmit such awareness to their learners. This paper argues that a higher proficiency reader can be made aware of the values and cultural norms of a specific community through studying illustrations of speech acts in literary texts. It is further argued that the learner of English can make use of such texts to become aware of the way people speak in different cultures, even when the language used is the same, i.e. English. The reading teacher's role can and should include making language learners aware of such pragmatic differences in speech act realizations. To demonstrate how this can be done, examples of the speech act of giving and responding to compliments are given using excerpts from a literary text. A text about the experiences of an American traveling in Japan provides examples of differences in the way Japanese and Americans respond to compliments. These examples are analyzed to highlight the cultural differences that underlie them, and suggestions are given for raising students'

awareness of these cultural differences to improve their communicative competence.

Compliments

Compliments are primarily aimed at "maintaining, enhancing, or supporting the addressee's face" (Goffman, 1967). Compliment-giving and responding behaviour are used to negotiate social identities and relations. Consequently, inappropriate choice of responses can lead to a loss of face. Manes and Wolfson (1981) research the infinite number of indirect realizations of a compliment and Chick (1991) investigates the many realizations of the responses to compliments. Chick's (1996) study shows significant differences in the frequency and use of response strategies by different ethnic groups in the University of Natal, Durban campus. For instance, the Indian sample tended to give priority to the principle "avoid self-praise" over the principle of "agreeing with the speaker." In another study, Olshtain and Weinbach (1988) looked at 330 Israeli and 330 American responses to compliments and concluded that Israelis accepted a compliment with greater difficulty than Americans. The American subjects were likely to say "thank you" while the Israelis tended to apologise or to be surprised. Thus it can be seen that in some cultures an acceptance of the compliment is the norm, while in other cultures an acceptance would signify some derogatory connotations about the interlocutor who accepts the compliment.

Specifically regarding the Japanese, there is prototypical agreement among researchers that common responses to compliments are denial and avoidance. Saito and Beecan's (1977) study shows Japanese normative response to compliments is a mixture of mainly negative ways manifested by denial and avoidance, but may also at times use positive responses manifested by gratitude.

There has been much interest in the teaching of pragmatic transfer of speech acts across cultures. Olshtain and Cohen's (1991) article on the teaching of speech behaviour to non-native speakers of English defines a compliment as a speech act to express solidarity between speaker and hearer and to maintain social harmony. This goal will not be achieved if speakers/learners are not aware or made aware of the variations in response patterns across cultures. For example, Saito and Beecan's (1977) study showed that when responding to compliments, American learners of Japanese did not use avoidance as much as native speakers of Japanese. This minimal use of the avoidance strategy as compared to the common use of it by native speakers of Japanese could lead to misunderstanding, undermining the intended goal of maintaining social harmony. Findings like these demonstrate the need for teaching target language learners to recognize culturally-based differences in complimenting behavior.

Materials and Methods

Dunham (1992) describes a series of techniques for teaching complimenting behaviour, comparing how it is done in different cultures. The techniques include phrase lists and role play. However, one unmentioned technique is using selected target-language reading texts which contain extensive dialogue between members of different speech communities as a source for consciousness-raising of the many manifestations of the response patterns to compliments. Teachers can compile extracts of such dialogues for comparison and discussion.

This discussion shows how excerpts from a literary text, *Bicycle Days* by John Burnham Schwartz, were used in the classroom with the aim of showing different speech realizations for responses to compliments by English and Japanese speakers. Of course, different books can be used according to content and teaching goals. Regardless of which book is used, the role of the teacher is to alert and sensitize students to the differences in the communication styles and expectations of interlocutors from different cultures. As shown below, the selections from the text can be used as a

springboard for further discussion and analysis. Links between such realizations and cultural norms can be made explicitly by the teacher or through awareness-raising activities by students. Analysis can help learners learn to adapt their responses to a compliment in such a way that it aligns with the value systems of the interlocutor.

Analysis of Text

Examples (presented below) from *Bicycle Days*, a record of a young American's sojourn in the social and business worlds of Japan, show many responses to compliments both by Japanese and American interlocutors which demonstrate cultural differences in responding to compliments.

Example 1
Alec (the American) to Mrs. Hasegawa (his Japanese hostess) (p. 42)
Alec: The sukiyaki is delicious
Mrs. Hasegawa: No, it is terrible

Example 2
Alec to a Japanese woman (p. 166)
Alec: Your blouse is beautiful.
Japanese woman: No, it is nothing.

In examples 1 and 2 the Japanese disagrees with and denies the compliment. Humility and modesty, part of Japanese cultural norms, are reflected in such a denial. Negating a compliment is a deferential act aligned with cultural norms and value systems (Saito and Beecken, 1997). The reading teacher can then use these examples as a trigger to ask the following questions: "How would you react to such a compliment in L1? In L2?" and "Is the Japanese hostess rude in not responding to the response in example 3?".

Example 3
Alec to Mrs. Hasegawa (p. 248)
Alec: Your dress is very pretty, mother.
Mrs. Hasegawa: Eat.
Alec: The shrimp is delicious.
Mrs. Hasegawa: Eat the rice, too.

Example 4
Alec to a Japanese girl (p. 51)
Alec: Nice to meet you. Your English is terrific
Japanese girl: Not true, but thanks anyway.

Example 5
Alec to a Japanese girl (p. 98)
Alec: You have a good voice.
Japanese: Thank you but I do not practice enough

Example 4 shows that with the young Japanese interlocutor Alec receives a negation of the compliment followed quickly by thanks, whereas in example 5, although the Japanese speaker initially begins by thanking, this response is quickly followed in the same turn by a demeaning of self ("I do not practice enough"). The compliment is downgraded in the response. However, in sharp contrast, Alec's American friend immediately responds to a compliment by thanking Alec in Example 6 (below).

Example 6
Alec to American friend (p. 176)
Alec: You look good, too.
American friend: Thanks

Instead of doing the analysis for the students, the teacher could ask leading questions or a broader question like, "Is there any difference you see in the way the Japanese and the American respond to compliments? Compare examples 3-6."

Example 7
Alec with Japanese grandparents of his hostess (p. 152)
Grandfather: Grandmother makes the best *nabe* in Japan. The best.
Grandmother: It is not true Alec. My husband is only teasing me. Besides, Alec is helping me. He is a very good cook
Alec: (silent)

In example 7, the Japanese grandmother not only rejects her husband's compliment

but in turn uses this as an opportunity to pay a compliment to Eric. Eric, the American, who would normally accept a compliment by thanking the speaker, ignores this compliment and does not respond to it. Perhaps he does not perceive it as a compliment but as a means used by the Japanese grandmother to reduce the compliment by deflecting the compliment to Alec.

The teacher could at this juncture also use this opportunity to discuss the different functions of compliments. What appears to be on the surface a compliment could be meant as a sarcastic comment, or a joke, or in this case perhaps a saving of Alec's face, if this was the intent of the Japanese host.

The teacher could also use such dialogues to discuss the realisations of not only the responses but also the form and nature of the compliments themselves: the number of times people compliment, the kinds of things people compliment, the words used and how they differ from culture to culture.

Thus, it can be seen that in such an analysis, the teacher can use the text to make the language learner not only aware of cross-cultural differences in responses to compliments but also of the nature of a given compliment itself.

Conclusion

This paper advocates an additional dimension to the role of the reading teacher. The teacher has to make advanced language learners aware of cross-cultural differences in communication. Responses to compliments and other speech acts vary across cultures. Responses to compliments include acceptance of the compliment, deflecting and even ignoring it. The language teacher in the reading classroom can make use of appropriate reading texts as a starting point to such cultural awareness. While this paper provides examples of the responses to only one speech act, compliments, literary texts can be used to sensitize the more proficient language learner to socio-cultural ramifications of a range of speech acts.

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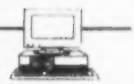
Links to Literacy



Readers are encouraged to submit annotated lists of links and reviews of sites in their literacy based area of interest. See the Submission Guidelines in this issue for more information. Note that opinions expressed here are not necessarily those of the Foreign Language Literacy SIG nor of the Japan Association of Language Teachers (JALT).

Linking Yourself to Professional Development

by Charles Jannuzi
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With each issue of *LAC*, we try to bring you link descriptions and reviews of sites that offer real value and content for educators. In this issue of *LAC*, we will look at links that you may find useful for your own professional development. There are brief descriptions and reviews of sites, followed by a rating system that evaluates them on these criteria: *content, design, navigability (within the site), links (to other useful places on the WWW)*. Rated sites are scored on a scale of one to ten on each of these characteristics.

ELT News
<http://www.eltnews.com>

Launched last year, this site for ELT in Japan very quickly became one I visit everyday. The layout is visually simple and effective. The opening page provides you with a newspaper-like variety of ELT-related stories, and takes you to where you want to go. It also, among other things, links you to more information about those stories, various ELT sites, and world news. This is also a great site to find out about textbooks and other course materials, and there are sections you can link to that contain useful write-ups of concepts and activities (look for the links to the *Pedagogue* and *Teaching Ideas* sections), so this site could also be listed in the second section of this column. Readers are also invited to send e-mail to the editor and to subscribe to an e-mail newsletter.

Rating
Content: 9 Design: 8
Navigability: 9 Links: 7

EL Gazette
<http://www.elgazette.com>

There are true web publications and then there are publications on the web. ELT News (above) is an example of the former; EL Gazette is of the latter category. The ELT-industry newspaper of the same name has established an electronic edition with this site. If you have an advance browser (like *Netscape Navigator 4.x* or *MS Internet Explorer 4.x*) enabled for Java, prepare for a little wait as your PC downloads the "applets." For a site that claims to contain the latest news relevant to ELT, I found it a little disappointing that, as of 13 March, the site hadn't been updated since 26 February. Also, for a publication with a supposedly global reach, the news seemed limited to the UK, the Commonwealth, and two countries of Western Europe. Still, viewed as a site that complements ELT News (with its Japan focus), it is well worth regular visits.

Rating
Content: 7 Design: 8
Navigability: 9 Links: 6

Humanizing Language Teaching
<http:// www.pilgrims.co.uk/hlt>

A newly created on-line magazine published by the venerable Pilgrims organization (known for its high-quality student and teacher courses), this site will become one I regularly visit if it gets updated (only one issue, February 99, was up at the time of writing this article) as often as promised (every six weeks or so).

Introducing the magazine is an editorial from Paul Davis and Mario Rinvolucri which states, "Each issue will carry a major article in the area of humanistic thinking.... We want the magazine to become interactive so please send ...your articles and letters. The humanistic movement is gathering strength and this new Pilgrims initiative is a further sign of the times. The magazine succeeds if it becomes a genuine humanistic forum."

The first issue is very good if a bit skimpy and indicates that, with people like Paul Davis and Mario Rinvolucri as regular contributors, it could continue to develop into something outstanding. Articles can be viewed as HTML loaded on your browser or you can download them in a MS Word file.

Rating

Content: 7.5 (what is there is excellent)
Design: 8 Navigability: 9 Links: NA

(*Note*: From <http://www. pilgrims.co.uk> you can connect to <www.aaaefl.co. uk/aaa/>, which is an extensive links page for ELT.)

Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development (ASCD) <http://www.ascd.org>

This is the on-line establishment of the rather large American-based organization of the same name. If your interests are educational leadership and management (including classroom management), the ASCD and its site are highly recommended. This is a comprehensive site mostly designed to market membership in and materials published by the ASCD, but the reason why it finds a place in this issue of ***LAC*** is that on-line professional development courses are available here. The courses available include: *The Brain, Multiple Intelligences,* and *Planning for Technology*. At $24.95 (USD) each, they would be a inexpensive way to learn more about relevant subjects using the newest technology and learning mode while trying out WWW-based learning. You can register for the courses on-line at <http:// www.ascd.org/pdi/pd.html>. Any ***LAC*** reader who tries one of the courses is encouraged to submit a review.

Rating

Content: 8 Design: 8
Navigability: 9 Links: 8

***Barfield**, cont'd from p. 10*

awareness also involves a heightened degree of effective and independent strategic control on their part. At the bare minimum, these learner surveys point to some central questions about reading development in a foreign language.

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Book and Teaching Material Reviews

Edited by Bern Mulvey

Beginning to Read and the Spin Doctors of Science: The Political Campaign to Change America's Mind about How Children Learn to Read. Denny Taylor. Urbana, IL: National Council of Teachers of English, 1998. Pp. I-XXIV & 443. ISBN 0-8141-0275-1

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As recent articles in many reading theory and literacy publications indicate, phonological and/or meta-phonological processes in reading alphabetic languages are being given considerable prominence. However, overall, the relative importance of this issue to literacy acquisition and reading for comprehension and learning is being blown far out of proportion. Perhaps because the issue lends itself well to experimental treatments and studies and theorizing, much is being published about the subject. Phonological and phonemic awareness, for example, are being forced into a reductionist, experimental framework that treats these metalinguistic skills as somehow causally underlying learning to read. This reductionist approach is now being used to justify a revival of explicit, direct instruction of phonics and other such "pre-reading" skills for beginning literacy in the English-speaking world.

This resurgence in the faith in code-and-skills-based instruction brings with it an attempt to renounce whole language (see Onore, 1999, for an account of what happened in one school when the staff divided over the issue). This trend so dismays Denny Taylor that she has expanded a project that was supposed to be a twenty-page critique of phonemic awareness studies into this rather large volume (see, though, Troia, 1999, for just such a critique). In addition to scholarly periodicals, much has appeared in the popular press concerning phonemic awareness and phonics. However, if you really want to understand more deeply just what the academic research and trends in instruction have to do with what is going on in education and politics, this book may well be the only book you will need to read.

Some academics might dismiss Taylor's book for its sometimes personal, opinionated, and subjective prose. Is she objective at all? My impression is she is quite objective and analytic when she has to be, and devastatingly analytic against phonological skills advocates or those who would treat phonics outside of a whole language approach in the classroom.

This book is a continuation of Taylor's innovative approach to writing for an audience that might include academics, but takes in classroom teachers, administrators, literacy volunteers, concerned parents, or anyone interested in the subject who finds the coverage in the popular press inadequate. Taylor has built a solid academic reputation on the basis of her ethnographic studies of family and community literacy, and has used this considerable research background to create such accessible, notable, award-winning works as *Growing Up Literate*, *Learning Denied*, and *Toxic Literacies*. Always striving for the accessibility and sense of style that seems to elude most writers in literacy and language education, she seems to revel in mixing genres in order to get her information and opinions across to a general audience.

Beginning to Read builds on Taylor's previous books for a general audience. It incorporates a selective review of the research (highly critical in its analysis), ethnography, personal correspondence, listserv e-mail exchanges, journalistic writing, interviews, narrative, and well-written personal reflections. Whether or not an

academic reader or teacher agrees with her pro-whole language stance, most would have to concede that Taylor has successfully challenged, redefined, and thoroughly expanded the possibilities for writing for publication in literacy and language education.

From both psychological and sociocultural perspectives, Taylor mounts an airtight attack on much of the phonological/ phonemic awareness research. Her discussion is well worth quoting just as she has summarized it in her book:

1. Phonemic awareness experimentation rests on the assumption of cultural and social uniformity.
2. There are no children in the phonemic awareness studies, only labels, aggregates, and measures.
3. In phonemic awareness research, there is a complete separation of children's everyday worlds from their performance on certain isolated cognitive tasks.
4. In phonemic awareness research, the form of written language is separated from the meaningful interpretation of text.
5. Phonemic awareness research is based on the false assumption that children's early cognitive functions work from abstract exercises to meaningful activity.
6. In phonemic awareness research, the tests given to children provide measures which are of no value outside of the testing situation.
7. In phonemic awareness research, there is an underlying assumption that there will be a transfer from isolated exercises to reading texts.
8. The direct application of experimental research on phonemic awareness to classroom situations changes the relationships that exist between teachers and children. (pp. 89-90)

Also damning is the misuse of statistics in many of the empirical studies on phonological /phonemic awareness: "the manner in which the sample is drawn, the nature of the population from which the sample is drawn, and the kind of measurement or scaling which is employed to define the variables involved, *all preclude the use of parametric statistical methods* (p. 16, Taylor's emphasis)." Yet such parametric statistical methods pervade emprical research in literacy and language education.

Ultimately, the story of *Beginning to Read* is the story of Taylor attempting to find out who is behind the movement to use phonemic awareness research to justify ill-informed attempts to return to "basics" in how beginning literacy is taught. The political movement works hand-in-hand with the academic research, much of both originating in the states of Texas and California. These two states, not coincidentally, have large bilingual and ESL populations and are centers for the "English Only" movement. In politics, social trends, and education, where California and Texas go, much of the US is ready to follow. Both Republicans and Democrats want to be seen proposing and passing federal legislation to improve education and reading instruction, and often models for legislation come from populous, dynamic states such as California and Texas. One outspoken proponent of the phonemic awareness research and phonic skills approach is Governor Bush of Texas, a likely presidential candidate in 2000.

Taylor uses a controlling metaphor of the labyrinth. Setting out to write a brief paper, she is drawn ever deeper into a labyrinth of pseudo-scientific research supported and exploited by unscrupulous, opportunist politicians (both Democratic and Republican). The value of the research gets distorted in the mass media, which plays into the hands of the politicians. This in turn drives forces that engage in un-collegial attacks on academics—such as Ken Goodman, one of the founding figures of whole language—and run political campaigns to drive progressive, constructivist approaches to literacy out of America's schools. Whether or not there is a hegemonic complex of forces that will accomplish this is a matter

accomplish this is a matter of how national legislation actually gets interpreted and implemented at the state and local level. No matter what happens, I think most middle class people will still learn to read their native English. Bilinguals, immigrants, racial and cultural minorities, and the economic underclass are still not going to get fair treatment under programs for national educational reform—perhaps far worse treatment is coming. It is on this point that Taylor is most outraged. Still, Taylor is not paranoid nor is she hopelessly negative in her opposition. She gives the fullest account that I have read of what is happening in the "reading wars" in academia, in commercial publishing, in schools, and in the political arena. This book could well change the course of battle.

References

Onore, C. (1999). Whole language, whole school, whole community: Truths and consequences. *English Education, 31*, 150-168.

Troia, G.A. (1999). Phonological awareness intervention research: A critical review of the experimental methodology. *Reading Research Quarterly, 34*, 28-52.

The Plain English Guide: How to Write Clearly and Communicate Better. Martin Cutts. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996. Pp. 165. ISBN 0-19-860049-6.

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There is a popular— usually journalistic— type of writing in which the author analyzes issues of grammar, usage, and etymology and then acts like a judge on the language. Often the "expert" does not prescribe from any special authority other than being a persuasive writer with a wide audience. We in the language and literacy education fields must be wary of narrow prescriptive approaches to language. No sooner do we tell a student that there is a certain way to say or write something— evoking a rule or "native speaker intuition" —than corpus analysis (that is, an account of what many other native speakers say or write) contradicts us.

Sometimes narrowly prescriptive approaches to English (almost always of the standard and even literary sort) are justified by the idea that they preserve or restore the "logic" and "clarity of expression" of the mother tongue. In actual fact, logic is, more than anything, a slippery rhetorical term (how can anyone dare argue with "logic" once it is invoked?). Moreover, native languages go where the younger members of the speech communities take them. Teachers may ban a double negative construction like, "I don't got none", because, "logically", two negatives make a positive statement. But here, scholastic logic and real-world clarity part, as deep down, children know it is a prohibition on a very effective, emphatic way of saying, "I don't have any."

Cutts' *Plain English Guide* is prescriptive, but with the overall purpose of helping writers and their readers to communicate. First, he emphasizes that his book sets down guidelines, not rules. For example, he suggests that writers aim for sentences that average 15-20 words. That does not mean sentences can not be shorter or longer. Second, his guidelines are not arbitrary nor isolated from real communicative purpose. In the case of writing sets of instructions, he suggests testing them with typical users to see if the intended audience can follow them. Moreover, in his own research, business and legal documents rewritten using the guidelines for plain English have consistently done better with focus groups than the originals.

Plain English, interestingly enough, Cutts informs us, has its roots in language in education. He writes,

> In England in the 1920s, CK Ogden and IA Richards devised Basic English. Its core was a vocabulary of 850 words which... could, they believed, say everything that needed to be said. Their three aims were that Basic should

> introduction to full standard English for foreigners, and a kind of plain language for use in science, commerce and government. (pp. 5-6)

Perhaps because Basic English—along with other linguistically based innovations like the Initial Teaching Alphabet (ITA)—did not fit with native intuitions and views of the language, it never has received full acceptance and legitimacy. Still, the idea of it can still be seen in the many attempts to "grade down" the difficulty of texts used to teach students of beginning literacy and ESL/EFL learners. Most mainstream approaches to TEFL still control the structure and vocabulary presented in the syllabuses. In Japan, Ogden and Richard's 850-word set has been revived by *Mini-World Magazine*, a publication intended as topical, realistic reading and study material for EFL learners.

Politicians who used populist appeal to achieve their ends—such as Theodore Roosevelt and Winston Churchill—embraced the idea of plainer, more accessible English in public discourse. George Orwell's body of work still stands as a formidable weapon in the fight against cant and obscurantism (that is, language used in bad faith in attempts to control thinking and shared representations of reality). From the 1970s on there has been a steady campaign to bring plain English to politics, business, law— or to any type of discourse where the public must deal with elitist professions and institutions. It could be noted that this coincides with a loss of faith in the special knowledge claims of technocrats and professionals. Baby boomers will remember the failed wars on cancer, Vietnam, and poverty as failures of science, technology, and modern management. Perhaps much specialist knowledge appears as nothing more than needlessly difficult language only disguised as knowledge. And, have not too many professionals used their language to obscure the truth while keeping their activities closed to outside analysis?

Cutts tells how plain language movements have enjoyed some political, educational, and commercial success in the English-speaking world and in the countries of the European Union. His plan, though, is not to impose his own views of how language should be used because he is a language conservative. Rather, for most of this book he establishes and explains the guidelines for plain English, showing in example after example just how to use it in real prose. The guidelines are broken up into six areas of concern: *style and grammar*, *preparing and planning*, *organizing the information*, *management of writing*, *plain English for specific purposes*, and *layout*.

In the most extensive area of concern, style and grammar, the most obvious and useful piece of advice is for writers to make their sentences shorter. Length that works against comprehension is always a danger in writing. It is easy as a writer to overuse the recursive and mnemonic nature of the mode and say too much. Cutts recommends an average sentence length of 15 to 20 words and a variety of sentence types to make prose readable but interesting. One method he explains is just to use more full stops and begin shorter sentences with the connecting words, like 'however', 'but', 'so' and even 'and'. Other ways to achieve shorter but effective sentences include the following:

- get rid of unnecessary repetition;
- use lists of shorter phrases and clauses instead of traditional sentences and paragraphs;
- and do not clutter the main ideas of a passage with unnecessary language.

Along with unnecessary wordiness, unnecessarily long words mark difficult English. While it is easy to justify uncommon words when they do convey a special meaning or nuance, often long words just "over-dress simple ideas." True, an impressive and varied vocabulary can make your writing interesting to read, but what if readers can not understand what you write? Cutts gives a long list of words and phrases

Cutts gives a long list of words and phrases that make up the word choice of "officialese" and offers plain English alternatives. For example, the next time you find yourself using a word like "endeavour," why not choose "try" or "attempt" instead. If your school "institutes" a new program, why not just say "begin" or "start"?

Within the area of grammar and style, there are many other obstacles to achieving plain English. Notably, Cutts does not rule out the use of the passive voice, but wants us to avoid it unless it is necessary for the proper topic reference or emphasis (and he shows when it is unavoidable). Academic writers often use the passive voice, though, because they feel that is sounds more objective. Another over-used device—and one that works with the passive voice to create academic style—is the substitution of nominalizations for action verbs. Or, in plain English, we use too many abstract noun and noun phrases when we could get to the point with active verbs in shorter, clearer sentences.

Many language pundits are against non-sexist language. Not Cutts. He shows that, with proper planning, non-sexist language is not awkward and points out that

> Though sexist usage is not strictly a matter of clarity, any writing habit that builds a barrier between you and half your readers must reduce the impact of your message. So even if you disagree with the view that sexist writing reinforces prejudice and discrimination, it is still wiser to use inclusive language....inclusive writing usually makes more sense and is more accurate. (p. 71)

If you write or edit for publication, the chapters "Using reader-centred structure", "Management of colleagues' writing", and "Basics of clear layout" should prove especially useful. Writers and editors today are lucky because they live in an era of word processing and desktop publishing. But media-savvy readers expect language in print to be well laid-out and easy to navigate. Are modern reading habits evolving toward a "hypertextual" approach? Language with the best of messages can fail if it is not packaged for modern sensibilities. Cutts gives guidelines and models that can help even the most befuddled users of today's complex word processing and desktop publishing software.

The management chapter is aimed at those who must oversee others' writing in a company setting, but editors of publications can also benefit from its "middle way" approach. People tend to take their language and thoughts very seriously once they have put them into writing. Editors must take care to avoid offending with criticism and correction.

Chapter 18, "Writing better instructions," is one I took great interest in. In the army I had to suffer through many instruction and regulation manuals that were all but impossible to use while doing the tasks they were designed for. The thick volumes that come with computer software are a curse. As an EFL teacher, I hope I learned enough from Cutts because I have found it difficult to give simple, understandable instructions to my students. It is easy to forget that what seems like a digestible bit of information for the teacher can be an overwhelming stream of nonsense to the foreign language learner. Writing effective instructions is also a necessary activity for learners to do themselves. I hope to apply his ideas in my composition classes in the future—such as when students write up recipes.

It is a convention of the positive book review to lead into the conclusion by adding a few bad points. So well thought out and presented, so coherent and concisely complete is this book, I must skip the custom. The only thing I can think to write is that, since this is the type of book a writer or editor will want to have open by their computer, I do wish Oxford had given the paperback version a bit sturdier binding. In my copy some pages are in danger of falling

next to the computer. Although this is not a book specifically designed for ELT or EFL literacy, it is one that I recommend to anyone who deals with standard, written English for communication and professional purposes.

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The editors invite short reviews of books, tests, teaching systems, and other substantial publications relevant to the field of language education. Below is a list of such publications received by *Literacy Across Cultures* and currently available for review:

- *Feedback: Essential Writing Skills for Intermediate Students* (Oxford)
- *Words in Motion: An Interactive Approach to Writing* (Oxford)
- *Enjoy Expressing Yourself* (Kinseido)
- *English Composition at Work* (Kinseido)
- *Interactive Reader for Paragraph Development* (Kinseido)
- *College English Composition: From Basic Rules to Essay Writing* (Kinseido)
- *Basic Reading Strategies* (Eichosha)
- *Themes for Today: A Beginning Reading Skills Text*— Japan Edition (Shohakusha)

Interested parties should contact the Reviews Editor (Bern Mulvey) directly by e-mail at <mulvey@edu00.f-edu.fukui-u.ac.jp> or by mail at: Bern Mulvey; Fukui University, 9-1 Bunkyo 3-Chome Fukui-shi, 910-8507, JAPAN

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- articles (up to 3000 words, not too heavily referenced)
- perspective/opinion pieces
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- annotated bibliographies
- responses to ***LAC*** articles
- descriptions/reviews of literacy-related World Wide Web sites and materials
- classroom and teaching tips

for upcoming issues. In addition, we welcome annotated bibliographies and other collections of information on topics related to literacy, both for ***LAC*** and for our WWW site.

Literacy Across Cultures is published twice a year, in March and September. Submissions for a given issue should be received by the 10th of February and August respectively. We encourage relevant submissions that may not fit into any of the categories above.

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2) On a 1.44 mb floppy disk accompanied by a printed version of the submission. The text on the floppy disk must be provided in 2 formats, once in a Text file (.TXT) format and once in a Rich Text Format (.RTF). If possible, a version saved in a Word Perfect format (version 5.2 to 7.0) is appreciated. A short personal biography should accompany the submission. (See the address below.)

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